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CIA "Steps Out," Gets Into Policy

By Marquis Childs

IN A CEREMONY marking the laying of the cornerstone, with President Eisenhower as the principal speaker, the Central Intelligence Agency is stepping a little way out of the shadow of professional secrecy. When the building, nearly half the size of the Pentagon, is completed in August of 1961 it will be inadequate to house the staff of the agency.

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This is a measure of the way in which the CIA has grown in the 12 years of its existence. Under the CIA Act not only its operations but its budget, the size of the staff and all other details are secret.

Yet there are signs, and the public ceremony marking the laying of the cornerstone is one, that the far-flung intelligence agency would like to have the public know more about its overt functions. There can be no question, of course, about publicizing its covert activities, which include a wide range of work such as encouraging the defection of Communist agents who will reveal either in public or in private the working of the Communist espionage system.

In a free society in which there is an inherent distrust of secret government the CIA has stirred surprisingly little suspicion despite its remarkable expansion. Yet, the dilemma does exist and it is likely to become acute if the outward and visible signs of the cold war diminish in an era of negotiation with the prospect of competitive coexistence.

IN THEORY the CIA does not make policy. Under the law it is required to provide intelligence estimates—the raw material of policy—to the National Security Council and the President. Yet, with the great body of knowledge that it collects on Communist activities in every part of the world the temptation is inevitably strong to try to steer the nation on a course of strong resistance and counterattack.

Recently the Deputy Director, Air Force Gen. C. P. Cabell, made two speeches that seemed to suspicious observers to skirt the policy line. Speaking to the National Security Commission of the American Legion three weeks after President Eisenhower had invited Premier Khrushchev to visit this country, Cabell warned against "smiling faces from the Kremlin." He said that a free ride on the Communist merry-go-round always "turns out to be costly."

In an address to the National Guard Association early in October Cabell talked of the smoldering "Communist fire" in Laos and said, "It must be met with strong determination." The loss of even five or six soldiers in northern Laos in what the Communists claim is a "civil war" is important, Cabell told the Guard Association, comparing the Laotian battles to the "shot heard round the world" at Lexington in the American Revolution.

"To the free people of the West the bold evidence of Communist aggression is not very palatable," Cabell said. "Calling this 'peaceful coexistence' does not make very much sense to me."

DIRECTOR Allen W. Dulles is frank in saying that he would like to see some of the able economic and political analysts in CIA write and speak publicly on their specialties. His staff includes distinguished men in almost every field of intelligence analysis and research. Their work as analysts—refining down and interpreting the vast amount of material that comes into CIA—is open and above board.

One reason Dulles may be encouraging his associates to step out in public is because the burden on him is so great. He must invariably appear before congressional committees, and always in secret, and the pressure on him to fill speaking engagements is unending. For the first time in the nearly seven years that he has been director Dulles on Nov. 13 will appear publicly before a congressional committee to present an analysis of the Soviet economy.

This is in itself a radical departure since his predecessors all declined to testify in public. Dulles is one of the most dedicated and hard-working public servants in Washington, resembling his brother, the late John Foster Dulles, in his tireless expenditure of energy.

He is undoubtedly one reason that Congress has been content to vote huge budgets—estimated at close to a billion dollars a year—without supervision. Senator Mike Mansfield proposed a special committee to supervise the CIA, but this was turned down flatly by the congressional leadership. Mansfield says he still believes such a committee is necessary to protect the CIA from public doubt and suspicion.